

# Annual General Meeting



Wednesday 5 June 2024

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 111th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland will be held online by Zoom and in person at Edinburgh Zoo on Wednesday 5 June 2024 at 6.30pm. RZSS President Ian Marchant will preside.

## Agenda

- A. Adoption of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 24 May 2023
- B. Matters arising
- C. Presentation of the 111th Annual Review and Impact Report
- D. Chief Executive's Report
- E. Presentation and adoption of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023
- F. Election of members to the board of trustees
- G. Questions from members
- H. Reappointment of auditors: the board of trustees recommends Henderson Loggie
- I. Resolution on membership subscription rates
- J. Election result
- K. Presentation: From Formal to Informal Learning: Creating Stronger Connections with Nature, by Phill Mathis (Learning Manager) and Jess Wise (HWP Discovery and Learning Programme Manager)
- L. Vote of thanks



# 2023 AGM Minutes

Minutes of the 110th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS), held at Edinburgh Zoo and online by Zoom on Wednesday 24 May 2023 at 6.30pm.

## Present

Ian Marchant (President)  
Mary Bownes (Chair)  
Karen Blackport (Vice Chair)  
Roger Wheeler  
Andrew Kitchener  
Fiona Davis  
John Fitzgerald  
Karen MacEachern  
Katie Lennox  
Richard Rutnagur  
Sandy Batho  
Alan Miller  
Jack Kerr (Board Secretary)  
David Field (Chief Executive Officer)

And 138 members (78 in person and 60 online)

## Introduction

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm. IM welcomed members to the 110th Annual General Meeting and introduced BSL interpreter Jackie Greenshields who would be assisting throughout the evening.

## Apologies

Apologies were received from trustees Deborah Long, Peter Budd and Kerry Falconer.

## Business

### A) Adoption of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 18 May 2022

The minutes were proposed by IM and adopted by the membership.

### B) Matters arising

IM reported that all matters arising would be covered by MB and DF in this evening's presentations.

IM explained the proceedings of the evening, handing over to MB for her remarks and to present the RZSS annual review.

### C) Presentation of the 110th Annual Review and Impact Report

Welcoming members online and in the room, MB recognised the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the cost-of-living crisis. Highlighting that RZSS staff are key to the successful response to these challenges, MB gave thanks to DF and his executive team for ensuring the Society's financially sound state in these unpredictable times.

MB then presented the 2022 annual review video, which showed a vast range of RZSS achievements.

MB discussed the global conservation work RZSS contributes to, and the international partnerships held, stating that protecting wildlife in their natural environment is key to our RZSS mission. As part of these efforts a series of free online and in person conservation talks have been set up in collaboration with the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

MB explained that RZSS has been working hard to deliver the 2030 strategy, monitoring our impact and as a result producing an impact report, available online or as a leaflet.

MB concluded by thanking all the staff, volunteers, patrons, members, adopters and partners. MB then gave thanks to the trustees for sharing their expertise, with final thanks given to trustees Alan Miller and Deborah Long who have now reached the end of their term and will be standing down.

#### **D) Chief Executive's Report**

DF thanked everyone for attending, commenting on how wonderful it was to see so many people in the room and online. RZSS is now one year on from presenting the 2030 strategy to its members. The impact report presented reflects the hard work from RZSS, ensuring the successful progress towards the three strategy pledges.

DF gave personal thanks to all RZSS staff for the many achievements this past year, followed by thanks to the members, patrons, communities we work alongside, and the board of trustees, in particular Chair MB for her support.

RZSS is looking ahead to what comes after giant pandas. DF confirmed work will be carried out on the enclosure once the giant pandas depart the collection in December. The space will be used as a temporary holding facility for other species allowing essential enclosure works to be carried out around the Edinburgh Zoo site.

The monkey house will finally close with the last occupants due to leave the collection soon. Unfortunately, Brexit and Covid-19 have had a major impact on international animal transports resulting in delays.

DF confirmed the Scotland's Wildlife Discovery Centre development at Highland Wildlife Park is well underway and due to open spring/summer 2024.

DF discussed the three RZSS strategy pledges, including the high demand for our community programme. Additionally, a huge amount of work is going into measuring our impact and our conservation team have developed a measurement on how to prove RZSS are helping reverse the decline of species. RZSS have achieved the reintroduction of four species back into the wild over a four-month period including partula snails to Tahiti, pond mud snails to the Pentland Hills, pine hoverflies and Scottish wildcats to the Cairngorms.

DF reported the sad news that Mary Patterson, our previous head of education at RZSS, had recently passed away. DF concluded acknowledging that Mary changed the way RZSS education was run, and her legacy is what we see today.

#### **E) Presentation and adoption of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2022**

FD gave thanks to the previous Honorary Treasurer Tom Mitchell for passing over a healthy state of finances.

FD presented the accounts, saying performance had been good, starting with a strong balance sheet which continued through 2022. This had provided financial security and allowed the opportunity to take managed risk.

The 2021 operating surplus was exceptional due to donations through the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2022 operating surplus of £1.3m was also very robust.

Looking ahead to the 2023 budget, FD confirmed that a cautious approach has been adopted to reflect stable visitor and membership numbers, but to incorporate inflationary pressure and the cost-of-living crisis which impacts our visitors and staff.

FD discussed the high-level breakdown of expenditure as we see an 18% increase year on year on the operating costs. Inflationary pressures on costs have been noted.

Overall, the balance sheet remains strong with unrestricted reserves in excess of £20m, cash of over £10m and investments of £3m. The significant investment in Scotland's Wildlife Discovery Centre does stand out in the 2023 budget, with the intention to externally fund two thirds of this cost.

## F) Election of members to the board of trustees

IM stated that an election would be held this evening for three trustee vacancies. There were three new candidates and one further term trustee. Biographical details and supporting statements had been published in the papers for the meeting and the four candidates would give a three-minute speech.

- John Denerley (assisted by BSL interpreter Jackie Greenshields)
- Kate Fishlock
- Sandy Batho
- Simon Corcoran

IM opened the voting lines both in the room and online with clear instructions provided.

## G) Questions from members

*Q1. Sue Bell expressed concern and would like to know the plan regarding the use and introduction of electric vans and vehicles on the Edinburgh Zoo site, and the expansion of vans for people with limited mobility.*

DF replied confirming a programme is in place to change to electric vehicles. The Highland Wildlife Park programme has had to be scaled back due to the lack of electric chargers, while we look at adding additional charging points to the Edinburgh Zoo site. Accessibility and mobility vehicles have not been reduced on site, and new staff have been brought in to cover retired staff member Charlie Hewat who is greatly missed. DF explained that ultimately we would like a larger vehicle for onsite transport, but there is difficulty getting electric vehicles powerful enough to withstand the zoo hill climb. Additionally, eight mobility scooters have been introduced across both sites which are free to rent. The hope is this number will be increased.

*Q2. Harriet Lyall asked about transport from Aviemore/ Kingussie to Highland Wildlife Park. Expressing the difficulties to get transport from the town with limited buses and taxis. Has a shuttle bus been considered?*

DF said transport is also proving difficult for staff, so RZSS are currently trialling a staff bus which is working well. If this becomes business viable further investigation will go into options for public transport.

*Q3. David Windmill asked if RZSS would continue the good relationship built up with China over the years and whether these developed relations will add value to the Society, also in the context of trading relations?*

DF explained that panda diplomacy and zoo governance has evolved over the years. DF currently sits on the World Association of Zoo and Aquarium (WAZA) council and chairs the committee for population management which oversees global breeding programmes. It is increasingly difficult to get China to participate in these collaborative breeding programmes alongside modern zoo policies and procedures. Ongoing relationships need to be focused on animal welfare and cooperative breeding programmes and RZSS will use their contacts to attempt to develop this, however DF believes there will be limited further relations.

*Q4. Peter Roberts highlighted the strong cash balance and said it was good to hear about the cost saving projects but would like to hear about the investment in animal enclosures.*

DF confirmed that RZSS still has to pay panda protection fees and the installation of the solar field which reflects the strong cash balance. A lot of focus is currently on Highland Wildlife Park. Meanwhile Edinburgh Zoo is catching up on the back log of small jobs required and improvements to visitor facilities. Animal exhibits in progress include the zebra enclosure which is still awaiting planning permission opposite giraffes, the koala enclosure which is being re-addressed due to the inflation of costs, and the potential future development of a new rhino enclosure.

Director of Finance James Stewart confirmed there is an annual spend of £1.5m on infrastructure and animal enclosures, with additional fundraising for specific projects.

*Q5. Lynn Kitchen asked if there is a leaving date set for the giant pandas and how will RZSS cope with large visitor numbers wanting to see the pandas before they returned to China?*

DF confirmed no date has yet been set for their return although the contract finishes at the end of 2023. Visitors are already coming through the gates for the Giant Farewell of the pandas, and this should hopefully spread out the numbers throughout the next few months. There could be a burst of visitors nearer the final date but crowd management is in hand. DF confirmed our intention is to send a keeper to China with the pandas.

*Q6. Colin Brown asked when Inside the Zoo is going to be back on Scottish TV?*

DF replied that the two series of Inside the Zoo are on repeat and we are producing our own material to be broadcast, including advertising our brand and the RZSS vision.

*Q7. Jim Grindlay asked why the giant pandas do not seem to have enrichment or toys?*

DF explained that the pandas receive a comprehensive programme of natural enrichment. Their behavioural profiles are assessed through the RZSS Welfare Assessments Programme and are shown to be satisfactory.

*Q8. Elspeth Grindlay discussed the panda cam at the Smithsonian Zoo in Washington DC, stating their giant pandas can be observed outside frequently. Yang Guang used to be seen outside daily and is now not observed outside often and appears not as engaged,*

DF explained our pandas always have a choice throughout their enclosure and are not locked in certain areas unnecessarily. The welfare assessments would concur.

*Q9. Stephen asked what would be replacing the giant pandas?*

DF explained we are actively looking for a holistic experiential project.

*Q10. Natalie Nickelson asked what is happening with the dinosaurs and once they are moved off site where will they go?*

DF confirmed the animatronic dinosaurs will stay at the Edinburgh Zoo site for a little longer and we are in the process of sourcing a repair company to maintain the models. There is a second-hand sale of animatronics models in Bristol so this could be their likely destination.

*Q11. Natalie Nickelson sought confirmation on the future use of the saki monkey walk through exhibit now there are no animals in this space.*

DF confirmed the saki monkey walk through exhibit fencing needs to be replaced. Instead of a replacement exhibit there is much need in our zoo for quiet spaces. This area has been highlighted as a development opportunity for this purpose because of the established gardens and planting already present.

*Q12. Douglas Richardson said that after a comprehensive walk around the Edinburgh Zoo site he noticed over 25 empty enclosures. He noted the complications covid and the economy have had but wondered whether there should be more balance between new and refurbishing the old.*

DF acknowledged that in past years new species have been simply allocated existing enclosures, resulting in lots of fencing and perimeter walls. DF explained the focus is now not on how many species can be housed, but the journey visitors experience at both sites.

## H) Resolution on re-appointment of auditors for 2023

IM spoke to the resolution to:

- Adopt the 2022 accounts

- Re-appoint Henderson Loggie as external auditors for RZSS

The 2022 financial accounts were adopted by the membership.

The re-appointment of Henderson-Loggie was passed by the membership.

#### I) Resolution on membership rates

IM explained that the constitution requires any changes to membership subscriptions to be approved by members at the AGM. IM sought and received approval to increase membership subscriptions as shown below.

Category	Current Price	Proposed Price
Adult	£75	£84
Joint Adult	£118	£132
Child	£40	£45
Student	£50	£56
Disabled Adult	£75	£84
Disabled Child	£40	£45
Adult Life	£872	£950
Joint Adult Life	£1,225	£1,330

#### J) Election result

IM thanked all members for voting and reported that the election had now been verified. IM was delighted to announce that Sandy Batho stood unopposed for re-election and was duly re-appointed to the board, alongside Simon Corcoran and John Denerley as newly elected members.

Thanks were given to Kate Fishlock for her interest in becoming a trustee and for partaking in the election process.

#### K) Award of Honorary Fellowships

MB presented Professor Hannah Buchanan-Smith with an RZSS Honorary Fellowship to recognise her significant support, contributions and voluntary service to animal welfare. Professor Buchanan-Smith has also strengthened and promoted RZSS knowledge and understanding of animal welfare for many years and built RZSS relationships with the University of Stirling and the Scottish Primate Research Group.

Professor Buchanan-Smith could not attend the AGM in person but sent a video message from California, USA, to give her thanks. A citation is available on request.

#### L) Presentation: Connecting Communities with Nature, by Beccy Angus, Head of Discovery and Learning

Head of Discovery and Learning Beccy Angus presented on the impact report, discussing how the team are looking locally and nationally to build healthy communities that help nature. Accessibility and inclusion is at the heart of everything RZSS does, ensuring meaningful impact with the people we are working with and supporting.

## M) Vote of thanks

IM concluded the meeting by stating that what we as individuals chose to do and how we connect the next generation to wildlife really does matter. IM gave thanks to all involved today and the meeting was declared closed.

